



To: Members of the Senate Committee on Education, Sen. Phil Pavlov, Chair
From: Julie Rowe, AFT Michigan Legislative Mobilization Coordinator
Re: Opposition to SB 280
Date: June 9, 2015

AFT Michigan is opposed to Senate Bill 280, which would prohibit public employers from negotiating with their employees' unions to include release time in collective bargaining agreements. The scope of the bill is concerning, casting a wide net to severely inhibit the ability for labor and management to work collaboratively to improve teaching, learning, and the school environment.

Public schools benefit when labor and management are able to communicate and collaborate. The fact that some collective bargaining agreements include union release time is evidence of this. Currently, union release time exists only where the school board and administration have deemed it productive and more cost-effective to have personnel dedicated to resolving labor issues.

Collective bargaining is inherently a collaborative process meant to better the working conditions of school employees and the learning conditions of students. SB 280 prohibits release time for any union business activity and would hinder school administrators' ability to conduct business by prohibiting union officials from meeting with them during business hours. If not conducted during the day, school administrators and board members would need to spend significant evening and weekend time, potentially incurring substantial overtime expense.

We are also concerned by the legal implications of SB 280 on our local unions. It is the right of an employee to be represented by her union. If union officials are not able to be present for disciplinary hearings, local unions could be liable for failing to represent our members. However, our local unions and their school districts find that by having consistent union officials who work with administrators, teachers, and school related personnel on a regular basis, problems can be dealt with more quickly and cost efficiently before a problem is escalated to requiring a disciplinary hearing or filing of grievances.

In many cases, local unions reimburse the district for the time. Further, our local unions frequently reimburse the district for substitute teacher costs associated with release time. However, in some cases, school boards and administrators deem union release time to be a cost-effective way to improve the school and do not require reimbursement.

Of the almost 100 locals in our state federation, a very small number include union release time in collective bargaining agreements. In every instance, the scope, funding source, and use of release time is agreed upon by labor and management. AFT Michigan is opposed to SB 280 as further erosion of local autonomy and control through state intervention.

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